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And Her Hair Went With Her....

by

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Part One: WIGS AND WEAVES

THE SHOP

Lights up on two large doors facing down stage center. A sign hangs on the left door that reads "Sorry We're Closed". Two ACTORS enter, open the two doors, and together they wheel on two barber chairs, a television set, a CD player, two stands loaded with beauty products, a variety of wigs on stands, and a table on which sits an old fashioned cash register. The ACTORS put on smocks. ACTOR ONE, who is now JASMINE, late forties/early fifties with relaxed hair, puts a CD in the player. Nina Simone's "Love Me or Leave Me" plays loudly. JASMINE pulls a small envelope out of the pocket of her smock, holds it above her head, and dances around the shop, while the other ACTOR, who is now ANGIE, mid to late twenties with natural hair, sits in one of the barber chairs with her notebook sulking.

JASMINE

You ain't gonna get these tickets, you ain't gonna get these tickets!

ANGIE

I'm not paying you any attention.

JASMINE

I got tickets to Nina and you ain't got none.

ANGIE

You're not playing fair. Nina Simone herself wouldn't know the answer to that question.

JASMINE

(singing) To be young gifted and black you need to get yourself some tickets...

ANGIE

Your how old now Jasmine? Scratching on fifty and I swear you act younger than my daughter half the time.

JASMINE

Wah! Wah! You just pissed cause you gonna loose the bet and since the concert's been sold out for weeks, I guess that means... YOU AIN'T GOIN!

ANGIE

You lucked out and won them off a stupid radio show.

JASMINE

Oh, so now my morning jazz show is stupid?

ANGIE

It was luck! You were the sixth caller-big deal.

JASMINE

Sweetie for someone who is so smart, you sure get confused a lot. I was the fifth caller... and they did ask me a question about Ms. Nina.

ANGIE

Name a Nina Simone song? That's not even a challenging question.

JASMINE

But it was a question none the less and I knew the answer. Don't be hatin'.

ANGIE

We made a bet.

JASMINE

That's right.

ANGIE

And the bet was that you were going to ask me a question a day about Nina Simone until the day of the concert. And as soon as I got three right the ticket would be mine.

JASMINE

That's right. So you still got time. So what's all the fussin' for?

ANGIE

That question wasn't fair. It was too vague.

JASMINE

Stop complaining just cause you got the first one wrong.

ANGIE

I just think they should be more about... I don't know, like her life or song lyrics or something. Look at this. I started collecting all Nina's song lyrics and taping them into my writers journal.

JASMINE

And why would you go and do a thing like that?

ANGIE

Because it inspires ideas.

(recites from journal)

Black is the color of my true loves hair. His face so soft and wondrous fair. The purist eyes and the strongest hands. I love the ground on which he stands. It sounds like Shakespeare.

JASMINE

It sounds like Nina went and got herself a fine ass man. Maybe I need to call Ms. Nina for some pointers.

ANGIE

She didn't write the original. It's from an old folk song or something. Any other lyrics you want to know about? I have them all right here. Alphabetized by title.

JASMINE

That's called obsession and you need to seek some help. Now hush up so I can watch my Regis and Kelly.

(JASMINE turns on the television.
Someone from "American Idol" is being interviewed)

Oh dang. It's that weird boy from American Idol. Have you been watchin' it? He freaks me out.

ANGIE

I don't watch reality T.V. It kills brain cells.

JASMINE

Well this guy Jason looks just like Michael Jackson. Post surgery pale Michael. Not the cute one who had an afro and his own cartoon.

ANGIE

Justin.

JASMINE

Excuse me?

ANGIE

That guys name is Justin.

JASMINE

I thought you didn't watch reality shows.

ANGIE

I read about it.

JASMINE

Where?

ANGIE

In the Times.

JASMINE

Yeah. I'm sure. Anyways, it's down to Justin, Tamira, and some white girl name Kathy or somethin'.

ANGIE

Kelly.

JASMINE

Oh. I see. You been reading the Times a lot huh? I already put my vote in and I swear on my grandmother Stevenson's grave, if that Justin gets voted in and Tamira doesn't go to the next round, I will take to the streets.

ANGIE

So that's what it takes to get you to be political Jasmine? Not when I asked you to go downtown with me to protest police brutality and you suddenly had a headache...

JASMINE

I did have a headache...

ANGIE

Or when I had to literally drag you to vote on election day- but American Idol is what gets Jasmine excited to vote. I'll be damned!

JASMINE

Spare me Angela Davis. Sistah girl Tamira has it goin on with her funky little style. She's representin for us real black folks. Not that blond haired golden boy whose supposed to be sexy. We already had one Michael. We don't need another one.

ANGIE

Justin is sexy- kind of...

JASMINE

To me, blond hair and pointy noses means you got too much vanilla in your puddin'.

ANGIE

It's deeper than that.

JASMINE

Of course. Please enlighten me with your brilliant theory.

ANGIE

It stems from an identity complex-like with Michael Jackson.

JASMINE

I can't wait to see what your customers do when they walk up in here to get a weave and you inform them they're going through an identity crisis.

ANGIE

Complex.

JASMINE

Whatever. They still gonna whoop your ass! I'm funny today huh?

ANGIE

A bundle of laughs.

JASMINE

Come on, give me my props... show me some love...

(ANGIE quickly writes something in her journal and then begins to collect her things)

What you doin'?

ANGIE

My 9:30 is going to be here in five minutes and I have to make sure I have enough weave.

JASMINE

Who you got comin in?

ANGIE

Chrystal.

JASMINE

Oh Lord!

THE TORTOISE AND THE HARE

The actor playing JASMINE transforms into CHRYSTAL by putting on a blond weave which she pulls off of a wig stand. She sits in the barber chair. ANGIE stands behind her.

CHRYSTAL

Remember not too tight around the neck darling.

ANGIE

Alright.

CHRYSTAL

I know you black people like to have things tight around your necks. It must remind you of when you first came over on those ships. Singing spirituals and whatnot. But it makes me feel like I'm being strangled.

ANGIE

How have you been Chrystal?

CHRYSTAL

Life has been a challenge, as usual. Like just this morning, I had a very frustrating experience at the DMV. I went to renew my driver's license and after standing in that horrible line, I finally got up to see someone- and of course it was a black woman. And of course she had an attitude for no reason. I handed her my forms and she says to me, "You made a mistake on the ethnicity line. You put white." I told her my dear that is no mistake. I am white. Can you believe the audacity of that woman?

ANGIE

But, Chrystal, you are -

CHRYSTAL

Remember, you are my hairdresser not my psychologist Angie? We talked about this before. About how I became white. Do you remember the story?

ANGIE

I think I recall...

CHRYSTAL

Well, it bears repeating.

(Lights dim and focus in on CHRYSTAL in the barber chair)

It was 1978. The first day of the third grade. Our teacher Ms. Kern was dividing the class into two reading groups.

Group 1, she called the "The Tortoises" because, as she explained, this group was slow and wasn't quite ready for third grade reading material. Then there were "The Hares," the advanced group. She told us to get out our readers and I was very excited to read and show her that I was definitely a Hare. I had been reading books since the first grade! "Ms. Kern," I said, "May I read first?" "No you may not," she told me. "I've already decided who is in each group. The tortoises will be..." and she began calling out the names: "Antwoine, LaShonda, Demetrius, Kwame, Meecca, Sheriese, Lamont, DeQuan, and Chrystal." What? Me? Wait a minute you didn't even hear me read. I looked around at all of the kids in my group with their nappy hair, bug eyes and thick noses. "And the rest of you are Hares," Ms. Kern smiled. The white children looked angelic sitting there smiling with their hands folded in front of them, blond hair glistening in the morning sun. Even Peter Danbury, who I knew for a fact couldn't even spell the word cat at the end of second grade was chosen to be a Hare. I decided to wait until after class to talk to Ms. Kern: "Ms. Kern can I just read you a little from the reader? I know I can be a Hare." "Sure," she said, "Why not, I still have to gather my things." My hands were shaking. I read her a paragraph from Goldie Locks and the Three Bears- the best part where Goldie Locks comes back and finds the three ugly black bears in her bed. When I was done she looked at me smiling. "My goodness you are quite a reader. Are you really white under all that shiny black skin? Let me see if those eyes are brown or is that green? Yep I see some green, I knew it. You are wonderfully delightful. I think I will let you be a Hare. You're not like the rest of the colored kids are you?" "That's right, cause my eyes are green and I'm white like you said." "How cute! Now I must finish here. Run along." I will never forget that day that I became white, the most important day of my life. (CHRYSTAL's weave is now done) I adore my blond hair and green eyes. Don't you?

ANGIE

That'll be a hundred and fifty dollars please.

THE SHOP: COMMENTARY #1

Lights up on ANGIE and JASMINE alone in the shop. ANGIE is cleaning her area. JASMINE sits eating McDonalds

ANGIE

I will never forget that day that I became white.

JASMINE

She became white? That shit is funny. She can't really believe she's white?

ANGIE

Yeah, she does.

JASMINE

What's even funnier is that while she's steady pretending to be white, she's up in a black beauty salon getting her hair did! Ask her about that next time. If she's so white, tell her to take her ass down to Super Cuts-see what happens.

ANGIE

I think it's fascinating and tragic all at the same time. You know what they say, self hatred is the...

JASMINE

Black woman's poison. I know, I know...

ANGIE

You know Angela Davis talks about this idea of black people desiring to be white.

JASMINE

Oh here we go...

ANGIE

Of course she never wanted to be white. Only in moments where she wanted to prove a point. Like she talked about this dream of wanting to have a white face that she could put on and take off whenever she wanted to. Like she would go into a store that was for whites only -with her white face- this was during segregation. And she would look around the store like she wanted to buy something, and just as the white folks would start to help her and be nice to her she would rip off the white face and shock all of them. Doesn't that sound cool?

JASMINE

No. It sounds crazy. Goin' into a store with a white mask on?

ANGIE

I wish I could get inside Chrystal's head- see what makes her tick.

JASMINE

I swear that Women's Studies bullshit got your brain all confused. You always wanna analyze when the facts are right in front of your face. She's a freak.

ANGIE

It's called critical thinking and it makes you an intellectual.

JASMINE

O.k Miss Intellectual. Are you ready for your next Nina quiz then?

ANGIE

Yes, but you have to make it quick.

JASMINE

I don't have to do anything but finish my McDonalds and get ready for my next customer. Why you gotta leave early? Uh-oh. Did Ang go and get her a social life all of a sudden?

ANGIE

Very funny.

JASMINE

Got a hot date?

ANGIE

Jasmine.

JASMINE

Oh, I forgot. You'd rather write in that little notebook of yours then let a man take you out for a nice dinner.

ANGIE

First of all, that's what writers do. They practice by writing . And secondly, there is no man offering to buy me dinner. Besides, I'm not the only one in here who hasn't been on a date.

JASMINE

Touche, touche... but at least I try. I dress to impress.

ANGIE

I'm a mother. I gave up the luxury of fashion.

JASMINE

I just think you could try harder. Show of that figure a little more-I know you got one in there somewhere...

ANGIE

Yeah, well maybe I'm not interested in that stuff now. I happen to be passionate about other things.

JASMINE

Like Nina Simone song lyrics?

ANGIE

Exactly.

(sings)

Ne me quitte pas. Il faut oublier. Tout peut s'oublier...

JASMINE

Girl, you are a mess.

ANGIE

Oublier le temps. Des malentendus. Et le temps perdu. A savior comment...

JASMINE

What is you talkin about?

ANGIE

It's French. Ne quitte pas means , don't leave me.

JASMINE

Well vous le vous couche avec moi ce soi and get ready cause I got another question for ya.

ANGIE

Bring it on.

JASMINE

Ok. Well, since I got you good on the last question, I'm gonna go easy on you this time. What was Nina Simone's real name?

ANGIE

Too easy.

JASMINE

Well...

ANGIE

Eunice Waymon.

JASMINE

Well, alright! Feel better? That's one down, two to go.

THE AUDITION

The actor playing ANGIE picks up a long straight wig from a stand and becomes DEBBIE DRYER She sits in the barber chair. JASMINE stands behind her holding a smock

DEBBIE

Don't put it on too tight. I have an audition tomorrow and I don't want my vocal chords to get messed up.

JASMINE

OK Debbie.

DEBBIE

Thanks Jas.

JASMINE

So what are we doing with this head today?

DEBBIE

I just need a trim... for my very important audition tomorrow.

JASMINE

That's great. How exciting. How short do you want it?

DEBBIE

An inch or so. Hey do you think you could help me prepare for the audition.

JASMINE

I don't know anything about that acting stuff.

DEBBIE

Just pretend like you are the casting person. Ask me questions and stuff- and be real strict.

JASMINE

Oh! Okay. I can do that.

DEBBIE

Alright ready? Hi. I'm Debbie Dryer.

JASMINE

Next!

DEBBIE

What are you doing?

JASMINE

Isn't that what they do?

DEBBIE

You have to wait until I finish my piece.

JASMINE

Oh, sorry- let's do it again.

DEBBIE

Hello. I'm Debbie Dryer. I have prepared a monologue from the play, "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf".

JASMINE

Who's colored and killed themselves on a rainbow?

DEBBIE

No one. It's a famous play by Ntozake Shange.

JASMINE

That's sistah girls real name? It be killin me when black folks be takin on these crazy names- tryin to go back to their roots. I bet her name is Carol Smith or something. Ntozaka? Someone need ta sock her momma if that's her real name!

DEBBIE

Can we please get back to the audition?

JASMINE

I'm sorry. O.k. I'm ready this time.

(DEBBIE recites part of monologue from "the play")

DEBBIE

Ever since I realized there was someone callt a colored girl, an evil woman, a bitch or a nag - I've been tryin not to be that.

JASMINE

(as Simon with British accent) Thank you, very much. I've seen enough. (as JASMINE) Is that strict enough?

DEBBIE

Yes, that's perfect - but you don't have to do that accent.

JASMINE

(as JASMINE) It's Simon from American Idol.

DEBBIE

I see...

JASMINE

(as Simon) We're actually looking for someone a little more... "street." I just don't think you've got what it takes.

DEBBIE

I can be street! I'm really from South Side Chicago. (performing her best "ghetto") Ah no you didn't sistah girl! Don't make me come 'cross dis here table and slap dat ass. Don't make me break a nail.. Taquita just did these for me today with the diamond studs for \$29.99 and I ain't about to waste it on scratchin' you up! Shit! Think I'm playin'. I'll get Pookie and 'em up here to whoop dat ass- shoot! (she breaks character) How was that? Better?

JASMINE

(as JASMINE) I didn't say hoochie, I said street. It's a black woman who is breaking down because welfare services is coming to take her baby and her husband has just been murdered days before. Wow I'm really good at this. Maybe I'm in the wrong field.

DEBBIE

Oh. It's a drama?

JASMINE

(as JASMINE) Yes it is. Thank you. Next!

DEBBIE

No! No! Wait. I can do drama. Just let me go into a little sense memory here. Loss of a loved one feelings of abandonment. Wow. Here comes the tears. My dog Sparks was killed when I was nine. He was so small and fluffy. He just laid on the sidewalk, his fur matted from the impact of the dirt bike, and it was a hit and run. Those asshole kids. Why? Why? Why?

JASMINE

(as herself) How'd you do that? Oh wait- let me be Paula right quick. (as Paula Abdul) That was just wonderful Debbie. It made me very emotional. You are such an inspiration!

DEBBIE

Oh. Thanks. Just comes from experience and lots of training.

JASMINE

(JASMINE getting back in character. Speaks in "black dialect")

But, can you sing dog?

DEBBIE

Sing?

JASMINE

The character is a strong black woman with street sense who can sing gospel dog!

DEBBIE

Why do you keep saying dog?

JASMINE

I'm being Randy, now.

DEBBIE

Who?

JASMINE

Randy Jackson, the heavy set black dude who used to be a producer or something, he always says dog.

DEBBIE

Oh okay. Well yes..um..just a minute. Mi mi mi, sorry I have a bit of a cold, lots of phlem.. mi mi mi.. okay let's see here...gospel.

(She begins singing "Somewhere Over the Rainbow")

JASMINE

(as JASMINE) Who ever told you that was gospel?!

DEBBIE

Oh! Well I've always found the song to be very spiritual. Um...how about (sings) Swing low sweet chariot...wait that's not in my key (sings higher) swing low sweet chariot...

JASMINE

(as JASMINE) Girl, I need to bring you with me to gospel choir rehearsals. You need more soul in your voice.

DEBBIE

No, no. It's just my cold. Swing low sweet chariot...

JASMINE

That's really enough. Next!

DEBBIE

Thanks for the help Jasmine.

JASMINE

I think I found my true calling! Let's do it again and switch parts. Hi my name is Jasmine and I'm going to be singing "One Moment In Time" by Whitney Houston. (she starts to sing)One Moment in time!

DEBBIE

Next!

Part Two: NATURALS

THE SHOP VS. CHITLINS

ANGIE enters with an air of frustration. JASMINE, who is seated in her chair reading a book, quickly throws the book into a drawer.

ANGIE

I've decided to write a story about a baby's daddy that thinks he can get away with whatever in the hell he wants and acts like I'm the Wicked Witch of the West when I finally call him out on his shit.

JASMINE

I think that's already been done sweetie.

ANGIE

So you know this weekend was Monica's little birthday gathering, and LeRoy showed up late and empty handed.

JASMINE

Ummm... Umm...umm... to his own daughters birthday party!

ANGIE

He said, "I bought her a cake from the store a week ago and when I went to pick it up today, it still wasn't ready."

JASMINE

So she didn't have cake?

(ANGIE shakes her head)

That is pathetic. How do you of all people, Ms. Black Woman Power put up with his triflin' ass?

ANGIE

I don't! That's why he's no longer living with us-remember? How was your weekend with Bernice?

JASMINE

Besides shopping until our feet were swole, grandma had a barbecue for Bernice who came down from college startin' trouble as usual.

ANGIE

Uh-oh. How's your sister doing in school?

JASMINE

Girl, I ain't studyin' her. That place got her brainwashed.

ANGIE

Cause she's getting an education?

JASMINE

No. She just talk funny. She had the nerve to say to grandma at the barbecue, " please pass the chitterlings?".

ANGIE

So?

JASMINE

So..Grandma said, "Chicken wings?" and passed her the plate of wings. We all started crackin' up. I was like..no Granny she means chitlins. Grandma said, "aw baby why didn't you say that in the first place?"

ANGIE

I don't get it.

JASMINE

Of course you don't. Chitlins. She called them chitterlings. You know how white folks be wantin you to pronounce all them syllables.

ANGIE

That's called being educated Jas.

JASMINE

Oh here we go! Just cause you took some college courses you think you won the Pulitzer Surprise.

ANGIE

Pulitzer Prize.

JASMINE

I know what it's called. I said surprise cause- surprise! You ain't never won it.

ANGIE

Whatever.

JASMINE

So what you sayin' is people who don't pronounce their words proper are stupid.

ANGIE

No. What I'm saying from experience, is if you're a black person in a mostly white college you have got to represent yourself well. You can't be soundin' ignorant.

JASMINE

Ms. Black Pride calls that kind of talk ignorant. I'm sorry to tell you but that talk is our roots.

ANGIE

Ebonics is not our roots. That's called a failed educational system.

JASMINE

Now you getting carried away. My point is, is that Bernice is whitewashed. She wearin her hair all crazy, so I know she done lost her mind up at that school.

ANGIE

Crazy how?

JASMINE

Kinda like yours without the moisturizer and stickin out every which way.

ANGIE

So she's wearing it natural. And? If anything, that's even more afrocentric.

JASMINE

It ain't just that it's natural. Her shit is dry and all over the place. Like she ashamed to wear oil in her hair. You know how white folks can get. "Ooh, your hair is so pretty. How does it do that? Can I touch it?" Then be looking at their hand like they just wiped a elephants ass.

ANGIE

Stop! She's probably stressed out. It's her freshman year. My freshman year I looked like a wild woman. You know that the hair reflects the mood.

JASMINE

What are you preachin about now?

ANGIE

I am speaking the truth. When a sistah with a natural has a bad day, frustrated, had a fight with her man, it shows on her head.

JASMINE

What if she got braids? That's natural.

ANGIE

Exactly my point. Braids are neat, clean, uniform. Means sistah girl is in line, got her shit together.

JASMINE

So you sayin every black woman with braids got her shit together?

ANGIE

Think about all the sistahs you've braided. There's that something about them; they're confident; or it could just mean that they are uptight.

JASMINE

Oh come on!

ANGIE

And when you see her braids are starting to look fuzzy and tore up, notice how she's acting. She is starting to lose control.

JASMINE

I've heard enough!

ANGIE

Just look at me. It's natural, it's big: I feel free and powerful. It's got a hint of color means I'm flirtatious. It's not matted, it's not twisted up, it's not going every which way... It's just free and healthy- like me!

JASMINE

Ooh let me try that! It's straight and well kept which means I am organized and fierce. It's got a slight curl, which means I'm flexible and easy-going, it's got no color which means I'm in touch with my roots, and it's shiny and gorgeous- like me!

ANGIE

Good one.

JASMINE

Ya like that-huh?

B.O.C.

(The actor playing ANGIE transforms into KEISHA, a black woman with a nest of natural hair who sits in barber chair. She is putting on a smock. JASMINE stands behind her.)

KEISHA

(talking in a low volume) I bring my own smock. You never know what could be on the one's ya'll give us here. The first time I came here to get my hair done I didn't have my own smock... HUNNY...icoli, iboli, whatever it's called was probably all up on there. Jasmine... did you dip the combs in alcohol - I'm gonna trust that you did...

JASMINE

Of course, Keisha, we keep the shop very clean.

KEISHA

You can patronize me if you want, but honey...I am proud to be a B.O.C!

JASMINE

A what?

KEISHA

Black Obsessive Compulsive! You've seen it on Seinfeld, and on Frazier, but us B.O.C's are in full effect. We're just closeted cause our people don't put up with that shit! "Keisha let me get a lick of your ice cream cone"... "What you mean no?" Can you get a spoon? "Mutha fucka! I just want one lick. Why you gotta be all stingy?" I'm not being stingy. I just don't want mouth bacteria on my cone. So then I hear: "Crazy-ass. Black folks ain't supposed to be actin' like that. You got that white-people mental disease. What's that shit called? Obsolete, obtuse complexion-some shit- that's what you got." (Starts coughing) Ah man, I can't take this cough. It's a deep one. Must have caught it from homeboy on the bus. Why is it that people find this an acceptable thing to do? (She sneezes without covering her mouth) Or this? (She coughs without covering her mouth). Now I'm sick. Even though I held my breath for twenty seconds. That's the exact time it takes for germs to disintegrate after they've been released from their host body. People don't understand the danger of germs. Did ya see the movie "Out break"? Did you see all them nasty-ass monkeys? That's why I had to start my own company, B.O.C. Inc. This germ stuff is deeper than you think. My company is dedicated to the survival of our people. (JASMINE laughs) I'm serious. Think about it. What is black peoples primary mode of transportation in this city?

JASMINE

Buses and trains?

KEISHA

That's right. Public transportation. Moving germ receptacles! What kind of restaurants line the streets of our black neighborhoods? Organic markets? No. McDonalds, Wendy's, Burger King. Where are food servers the least likely to wash their hands? Fast food restaurants. It's a plan! They're killing us off. Why do you think health care ain't free? What community suffers the most? Blacks and Latinos. Doctors ain't gonna protect us!

(takes out sanitizing wipes and begins to clean her hands and the chair)

I went to the doctor last week- I had a cough, the shakes, couldn't see out of one eye, and you know what he told me?

JASMINE

What?

KEISHA

That I had a damn cold! Did you hear me? A cold! I had to take matters into my own hands. I went down to Tijuana, got me some of them Mexican antibiotics, that's why my hair is falling out a little in the back. But you can just even that up right?

JASMINE

Umm hmm.

KEISHA

So if you join B.O.C. Inc now, I am making everyone a special offer. A free germsuit.

JASMINE

Germsuit?

KEISHA

My own invention. A motorcycle helmet, some scotch tape, garbage bags, and some antibacterial gloves you can only get from France. So what do you think? It's a great deal. It's the key to our survival.

JASMINE

What do you want done with this hair Keisha?

KEISHA

Oh. Just a shampoo please and remember to even up the back.

(she coughs on JASMINE)

THE SHOP: COMMENTARY #2

JASMINE is seated in her chair. ANGIE stands behind her holding a flat iron.

ANGIE

Keisha had a point. That conspiracy stuff is real Jas.

JASMINE

Would you just stop with the Black Panther talk and concentrate on what you're doing. You need to learn how to hold a flat iron properly and bump the curl right.

ANGIE

How long have I been working here now?

JASMINE

And that's exactly why you should know how to bump the curl.

ANGIE

No one's complained about my press and curls.

JASMINE

Not to you.

ANGIE

Oh come on! I have some skills.

JASMINE

Yes, you are a very talented writer.

ANGIE

Jasmine!

JASMINE

Well, look how tense your hand is. Relax your wrist! If you hold it tight like that you'll burn the hair and get an angle instead of a bend. Have people walkin outta here lookin like Condaleeza Rice.

ANGIE

I bet she's a B.O.C. too. Like Keisha. Doesn't she seem like she'd be a little obsessive compulsive?

JASMINE

Well to me there are too many things to be worried about in this world as a black woman than to be having to think about germs.

ANGIE

Like?

JASMINE

What you mean like? You're a black woman. You should know.

ANGIE

I'd like to hear you pontificate for a moment.

JASMINE

Right. Well... keeping ourselves looking good. Maintaining our figures, you know, maintenance. Making sure our men are happy and taken care of, raising our children...

ANGIE

Jasmine! We are in a new millennium. Why do you still have that 1950's brainwashed mentality? That's exactly the kind of old school thinking that is holding sisters back.

JASMINE

Excuse me Ms. 1960's Woman Power. You work at a hair salon so you too would agree that maintenance is important, am I right? You also have a daughter that you are raising by yourself...

ANGIE

I have a daughter that I am taking care of yes- but it is not my responsibility to take care of a man who has no interest in doing the same for me and my daughter!

JASMINE

Oh here we go with that white feminist college talk.

ANGIE

Not only white woman are feminists. Tell that to Bell Hooks...

JASMINE

Who?

ANGIE

Or Sojourner Truth... or Harriet Tubman.

JASMINE

Harriet Tubman? Harriet Tubman was a slave, not a feminist!

ANGIE

Forget it Jas. Keep eating your McDonalds and living in ignorance. My wrist hurts anyway. I give up.

JASMINE

Alright. I will finish my own hair thank you very much. I like Mc Donalds! Give me a germ filled Big Mac anyday. You give up to easy. Don't get an attitude with me just cause you aren't stylistically gifted. Let's see whose so ignorant now. I got another Nina question and I can guarantee you won't get it.

ANGIE

Better watch your words...

JASMINE

How did she choose the name Nina?

ANGIE

How did she choose it?

JASMINE

Uh-oh Ang... it's not looking good... ya gonna give up?

ANGIE

Wait, wait, wait - shhhhhh- no-wait. She chose it because of some famous person, right?

JASMINE

Wrong. Nina was a pet name a boyfriend used to call her.

ANGIE

I'm sure.

JASMINE

And on top of that, she changed her name because her Mama was a preacher - bet you didn't know that neither -- and her Mama thought that Jazz was devil music...and so Miss Nina never wanted her mother to know that she was performing the music of the devil. So she came up with Nina-even though eventually her Mama... (she stops and looks around) Angie? Angie! Where the hell did she go?

GIRL PARTS

The actor playing JASMINE transforms into PHYLICIA. She is seated at a table in prison, wearing cornrows. ANGIE enters and sits with her at table. There is a slightly uncomfortable tension.

ANGIE

Sorry I'm late.

PHYLICIA

Yeah. I thought you weren't gonna make it.

ANGIE

No, it's just the woman I work with got me off track.

PHYLICIA

She your boss?

ANGIE

Kind of. I work at a hair salon so there's really not the same kind of corporate hierarchy?

PHYLICIA

You work at a hair salon?

ANGIE

What?

PHYLICIA

It's just... you look.. you carryin' that book bag, got your notebook out...like you got that smart girl natural thing goin on.

ANGIE

Yeah. But doing hair is... I don't know... kinda like being a psychologist in a way. You'd be surprised what people tell you while they're getting a good shampoo. Plus I have a little girl at home to feed ya know.

PHYLICIA

What's her name?

ANGIE

Monica. She just turned five.

PHYLICIA

Five. That's a great age. They still look up to you at that age. Want to be just like you.

ANGIE

I guess she is like a little version of me. Minus the Afro. She's actually stylin' the cornrows like you right now.

PHYLICIA

Well then she must be pretty special.

ANGIE

She's my little angel. Listen, I really appreciate you taking the time to do this. It's my first time doing this sort of thing- so I'm a little nervous.

PHYLICIA

What else am I gonna be doing? Ain't nothin' to do in here but work out, read bad books-cause they make sure we don't get the good ones, and talk shit about how messed up it is being in here. Maybe they'll show us a movie every once in a while.

ANGIE

Well today I just want to ask some questions about you.

PHYLICIA

Gettin' personal...alright. I don't mind. Most people just wanna talk to me about the same stuff, but I can tell somethin' about you is different. But I ain't telling you nothing unless I can get a cigarette. You got some smokes?

ANGIE

Unfortunately I don't smoke.

PHYLICIA

That is unfortunate. But I guess with a kid and all. Damn! I need a cigarette!

(ANGIE places a tape recorder on the table)

This thing makes me wanna bust a rhyme or something.

ANGIE

Oh, you rap?

PHYLICIA

Yeah, I use to rap and stuff. My boy Darin had a bootleg studio in his basement.

ANGIE

That's cool. I'm not really into rap so much anymore. Most of the stuff I hear nowadays is too misogynistic- all into degrading sistah's ya know?

PHYLICIA

Yeah, well I'm more into the female rappers like MC LYTE, Queen Latifah, Da Bratt, all them home-girls got some serious flow, but they be actin' like they ain't down- you know what I'm sayin'? Da Brat used to sport baggy jeans and big jersey's- actin' all hard. Now Hollywood's got 'em all decked out in mini skirts and high heels. Nobody's representin'.

ANGIE

It's hard to represent like that and still keep your career though.

PHYLICIA

Whatever. I mean obviously I'm not physically a man. I got tits and a cooch and all that- but my mind- my heart and soul is all a dude. People always sayin' it's not the outside that matters-it's what's on the inside. Them the same people be kickin' my ass or rollin' they eyes, or spittin' on me when they realize I'm a girl. So, no, I don't try to pass- I just do. Like what was that messed up movie about that white girl tried to pass in some hick town or somethin'?

ANGIE

Oh. Ummm...

PHYLICIA

See niggas - even if they figure it out- they ain't gonna kill the bitch. I been out to parties and stuff and got girls flirtin' with me- all up in my grill thinkin' I'm a dude. We be makin' out- she be tryin' to feel my thing, but I just move her hand and tell her I wanna take it slow. They love that. Make 'em want me more.

ANGIE

I see.

PHYLICIA

See, I don't go to lesbian bars cause I don't want no lesbian. I want a woman who wants a man.

ANGIE

How does that work?

PHYLICIA

That's what I was about to tell you. So after I meet the girl- make out at the party and stuff- I'll take her out to the show or to eat and we just keep kissin'- then after a while I just can't take it anymore. I want her so bad- you know? She's sayin' she's all in love with me- that's when I tell her.

ANGIE

What?

PHYLICIA

You know, that I got girl parts.

ANGIE

How do they react to that?

PHYLICIA

Well I guess about 90 percent of the time they still wanna hit it. Only a couple times I been slapped and never saw the girl again.

ANGIE

And what about Cassandra?

PHYLICIA

She's one of the ones that slapped me and bounced. But she was different. She was my first love. I had to do some serious groveling to make her mine.

ANGIE

Like what?

PHYLICIA

Romantic stuff. One time, I had my boy Darin in on it. See I ain't have no car at the time or no license, but he snuck his dad's Caddy and let me borrow it and I went to her house and begged her to drive to the beach with me - so we could talk. We spent that whole night on the beach, watched the sun come up. I got down on one knee and sang her "Still in Love" by Luther Vandross which is the first song we ever danced to together. She said no one in her life had ever shown her love like that- and she didn't care what parts I had. She wanted me for me. That's that! We were together for about five years after that- until she met Chris, but she was my heart.

ANGIE

And you had to protect her?

PHYLICIA

That's right.

Part Three: PRESS and CURL

THE SHOP VS. MISSISSIPPI

ANGIE enters the shop frantically. The song Mississippi Goddamn by Nina Simone plays loudly. The countdown sign on the wall reads- 2 Days Until the Festival

ANGIE

Is she here yet?

JASMINE

Who?

ANGIE

Ms. Bernadette.

JASMINE

Oh. No. You lucked out. She called and said she was running late. You sure you ready to do a press and curl?

ANGIE

Oh shoot. That's right. She likes those big curls right?

JASMINE

Umm-hmm. Lookin' like Weeze from The Jeffersons...

ANGIE

I can handle it.

JASMINE

You hear this song that's playing right now?

ANGIE

Yes. It's one of my favorites.

JASMINE

Well I'm playing it just for you cause it brings me too my next Nina question. You ready?

ANGIE

You talk while I get my station ready...

JASMINE

What tragic event triggered the inspiration for Nina Simone to write this song?

ANGIE

Are you really asking me this easy question? (JASMINE nods)
It was the lynching of.. or no the cross burning... I can't
remember which- either the lynching or the cross...

JASMINE

Let me stop you right there before you embarrass yourself
anymore. It was actually two events. I was trying to give
you bonus points. One, was the murder of Medgar Evars in
Mississippi and the other was the bombing of the church in
Birmingham that killed the four little girls. This song was a
turning point for Nina because she was just starting to
realize her power as part of the Civil Rights Movement. Bet
you didn't know all that.

ANGIE

Bet you didn't know that Angela Davis grew up near that
church that was bombed and knew those four girls.

JASMINE

What's that have to do with anything. I didn't ask you about
all that. I asked you about Nina Simone the woman who you
supposedly know so much about. Don't be a sore loser. I'm
gonna go get me some lunch. A nice juicy Big Mac. Have fun
with Mrs. Bernadette. Is she still seeing those little
people?

ANGIE

Yes she is, poor thing..

SWEET MOLASSES

The actor playing JASMINE takes a wig with large thick curls off of a stand and becomes MRS. BERNADETTE. She sits in the barber chair. ANGIE stands over her with a smock.

MRS. B

Not too tight with that there cover Angie. I don't want to feel like I'm choking.

ANGIE

Yes Ma'm.

MRS. B

Although these bad-ass kids I gotta put up with everyday be makin me want to choke myself half the time.

(suddenly she refers to someone who isn't there)

Anthony! Sit down and shut up before you make me come over there.

ANGIE

Umm.. Mrs. Bernadette.. do you want the usual press and curl?

MRS. B

(she nods) And trim the dead ends for me baby. The truth is I started out as a full-time exotic dancer. My mamma was crazy and my daddy wouldn't keep his hands off my ass, so I left Alabama and went up north and started dancing in them lounges. Why you lookin' like that? I had quite a nice little figure back then. Perky little breasts with Hershey kiss nipples and hips and an ass that would make even a white man wanna slap his mamma! Folks called me Sweet Molasses cause they said I made 'em feel hot and sticky. Then one night some high yella fella came to see a show and told me I was too fine to be dirty dancin'. Said I should be in pictures. I thought that was a sign from God so I set out to be a star... (beat) Chris! Stop messin' with that! Put it down!

ANGIE

Mrs. Bernadette, you have to try and keep your head still. I don't want to burn you with this comb.

MRS. B

Yes of course baby... so I went to New York and did real good. I did a few plays with The Negro Ensemble Company, Black Reperatory Theater, Broadway stuff, got so I was getting' big couldn't nobody touch me. (beat) Crystal, keep your hands to yourself!.

ANGIE

Mrs. Bernadette are you o.k?

MRS. B

My head got so big I decided to try for Hollywood. Auditioning for "Good Times" and "The Jeffersons". I was almost the maid on that show. Never could get a break. Ran outta money, had me a couple babies... now my kids are grown and I'm a broke down acting teacher at The Rosa Parks Community Center after school program! Ain't that a bitch. (beat) I just tole ya'll to walk around and act like your favorite animal. Don't know animal I know carry a purse and eat candy out of it. Precious! Put your purse down and pick a frikin' animal to act!

ANGIE

Maybe you'd like to hear some music? It'll quiet your nerves.

(She turns on the CD player. "Young, Gifted, and Black" plays)

MRS.B

That's Nina Simone.

ANGIE

Yes Ma'm. Jas and I love her.

MRS. B

What do you young folks know about some Nina Simone? Ya'll weren't even around during the Movement. Did you know that this song was written for one of her best friends, Lorraine Hansberry, do you who that is?

ANGIE

Yes Ma'm she was a famous playwright and activist.

MRS. B

Well damn! Most people your age don't know who Lorraine Hansberry is.

ANGIE

Well I'm kind of a writer myself. I've started writing... or interviewing someone for my book. I applied for a grant recently, so we'll see.

MRS. B

Oh that is so wonderful! You know what? Fuck it!

(MRS. B hops out of the chair and begins to pick up pieces of her hair off of the floor)

ANGIE

Oh. No. Mrs. Bernadette, I can do that with the broom. Please have a seat I'll clean it up.

MRS .B

No, no baby. You don't throw ya hair away. It's sacred. It has your energy in it. The wrong person get a hold of it-they likely to put a hex on ya. I was giving you some of mine for good luck. Here. Take this. Take it!

ANGIE

Yes Ma'm.

MRS. B

I used to bundle mine up in little medicine pouches and wear it around my neck. It brought me a lot of good things back when I was tryin to make it. It was me givin' up on myself that was the problem. Here. Hold it in your hands. Ohhh, I can see the change in ya already. I'm tellin ya! So you have it and don't you throw it away now. And let me know what happens with that grant.

ANGIE

Yes Ma'm. Thank you.

MRS. B

And you should run and go get you a copy of I Put A Spell On You, Nina'a autobiography. That'll tell you everything you ever want to know about her. They just re-printed it, so it's very popular right now- everyone's getting them a copy. I just told Jasmine about it just last week when I came in to get my nails done.

ANGIE

Oh you did?

MRS. B

Yes child. (She enjoys the music) ...speakin of Lorraine Hansberry.. A friend of mine from church is directing "A Raisin in the Sun" here at the community center and said I could be first to audition today. That's why I wanted my hair to look real nice! (beat) Tasha! stop hittin' DeAndre! Don't you tell me he did somethin' to you first, lyin ass. I saw you reach over and hit him on the head. (Back to ANGIE) Don't I look like I could play a good "Mama?"

GIRLPARTS

ANGIE enters. PHYLICIA sits at the table. ANGIE sits across from her.

ANGIE

Late again sorry.

PHYLICIA

Your boss givin you a hard time?

ANGIE

Yeah. And I stopped by the store to grab you these.

(She pulls out pack of cigarettes)

PHYLICIA

Good looking out. I appreciate it. So what are you getting in trouble for at work? Not doing the perms right?

ANGIE

I'm not in trouble. It's this stupid game- you don't need to hear about it.

PHYLICIA

No tell me. I'm tired of listening to myself talk.

ANGIE

Alright. See, there's this sold-out concert that I'm dying to go to, and Jasmine, my boss, won two tickets off of the radio by answering some silly question, and now she's quizzing me in order to get the other ticket.

PHYLICIA

You talking about Destiny's Child at the Amphitheater? I read about how that concerts been sold out for months.

ANGIE

Yeah, that's right. No. It's a Nina Simone concert. It may be her final tour. The thing is, Jasmine's always teasing me about how obsessed I am. She knows how much Nina's music speaks to me. I mean, I collect her song lyrics. Seriously, I have them all.

(shows PHYLICIA the lyrics in her journal)

PHYLICIA

Oh, ok. That's cool. That's how I feel about like, 2-Pac. I got all his lyrics in my head though. Keep Ya Head Up is my jam.

ANGIE

I had Monica when I was just starting school and I knew that Nina had kept pursuing her dreams even after she had her daughter. So I got myself a job at the salon, put Monica in daycare, you know- stayed in school... kept going.

PHYLICIA

Yeah, I feel you on that. 2Pac knows what it's like up in here and his lyrics just make me feel like shits gonna work out ok, ya know? My momma used to listen to Nina Simone though. I remember the record cover where she was kinda turned to the side. I loved to look at it when I was little. I would sit and look at it and then I'd look in the mirror and try to cock my head to the side like her you know she had those lips that looked like mine and hair that looked like mine, big nose, kinda stickin out forehead. Not like all those light skin sistah's with fine hair you'd see all the time on T.V. I just remember looking at the record cover all the time. My mamma used to play that record when she got drunk. So things wouldn't hurt so much. Yeah...yeah... so why don't your boss just give you the ticket? Ya'll ain't tight or what?

ANGIE

Yeah, we're tight. That's my sistah. She's just being stingy.

PHYLICIA

That's some bullshit. In here, we don't roll like that. Sistah's stick together like mothafuckin glue. Warden treats a sistah wrong- doesn't let have her privileges, or she ain't getting the medical care she needs, we all raise hell- bang on the bars, refuse to eat whatever needs to be done. On the outside sistahs be actin' foul to each other over petty stuff. Somebody been with somebody's man, somebody got on a outfit somebody else is jealous that she got something, some he said she said- bitch this bitch that- eye rollin' and hair pullin'. Here you can't take shit for granted. We are all we got in this joint. Don't nobody take care of us but us. And it works. Ya'll free sistahs haven't figured out ya'lls power in standin' together yet.

ANGIE

Self- hatred is the black woman's poison.

PHYLICIA

What's the point in hatin' on ourselves when we got everybody else to do that job for us.

ANGIE

I don't know. I really don't know.

MINIMUM WAGE

The actor playing ANGIE transforms into Denise by putting on a straight wig with a flip. She sits in the barber chair. JASMINE stands behind her holding a smock.

JASMINE

And so how did you hear about my shop?

DENISE

I just started a new job down the street at Kauffman Realtors. I saw it last week on my way to work.

(her cell phone rings. she picks it up, says nothing then hangs up)

JASMINE

Oh. O.k. That's good. I'm always happy to have new customers. How's the job going?

DENISE

It's fine for a nine to five. Mr. Kaufman is a real slave master. He calls me his secretary, but I'm really a personal assistant. (cell phone rings again) Kaufman Realtors. No he's not in yet. Maybe he did, but I'm sitting right in front of his office door, and he's not here. Hold on. I'll transfer you. (hangs up phone) I can't believe he gives his clients my cell phone number. This is my fifth job this month. I've been fired four times in one month, and none of the reasons have been in my control.

JASMINE

Are you sure you don't need to be at work?

DENISE

I'll get there when I get there. Massa doesn't get there until eleven anyway. At first I was working at a marketing company. You know, telephone stuff. The guy in the cubicle next to mine, we'll just call him Jeff cause that's his real name, he used to throw these paper airplanes into my cubicle with vulgar messages on them. I wanna stick my plane in your terminal, let me slide down your runway, you know freaky stuff. When I finally reported it I was told that the tweed knee length skirts I wear to work were too revealing and it was my own fault. Can you believe it- and Jeff turned out to be the boss's nephew- so nothing happened to him. Looking up my skirt, talking dirty to me at my job? So then I had to go down a peg and work at Shoe World. Not that there's anything wrong with shoes. But people got some nasty feet.

This older guy comes in to try on some athletic sandals and insists that I be the one to put them on his feet. That wouldn't have been a problem if he hadn't of had fungus growing out of his toes and rotting toe nails which were causing me to dry heave. I refused to help him into his sandals and was fired on the spot. (cell phone rings) Kaufman Realtors. We're closed for the day. I know it's only 9:30. We had a bomb threat. (she hangs up) So then I had to go even lower down on the ladder and work at a coffee shop. We'll call it Starchucks to protect its identity. Things started off well. By the third day I could make any drink off the menu with no mistakes and run the register. My boss said I had a lot of potential and he could see me being promoted to manager within six months. Everything was good until this bitch on her cell phone comes in, orders I guess a decaf vanilla latte, and a bunch of pastries. Well after I get all the damn pastries I forgot if she said decaf or regular. When I asked her to repeat it, this lunatic took her cell phone from her ear and snapped at me, " I already told you once. Figure it out." So I made it a regular. Well she took two sips of it and started having convulsions. I was fired on the spot. (cell phone rings) Kaufman Realtors. I'm not his keeper. I don't know where the hell he is.(she hangs up) Well a friend of mine worked at this bank and she said they needed tellers. This was a huge step for me so I applied and got the job. Now I don't have a car. I ride the bus to work. So my first day the bus breaks down. I'm late to work. I tell my boss it won't happen again. Second day a car runs a red light and side swipes the bus. I'm late again. My boss says he'll give me one more chance. Third day the bus is hijacked by a homeless man with an ax. I'm fired on the spot. My boss thinks I'm making it all up. He doesn't understand my luck with jobs. So that leads me to this job where Mr. Kaufman is accusing me of not taking the job seriously. Ain't that a bitch.

(her cell phone rings. she throws it on the floor. it breaks.)

Can you just give me my relaxer? I have a baby shower to go to after work.

JASMINE

Are you sure have time for a relaxer?

DENISE

Ummm-hmmm. And be sure to take your time.

GIRL PARTS

ANGIE sits alone at table fiddling with an envelope. PHYLICIA enters. She is completely bald. She sits at other side of the table.

ANGIE

I was sorry to hear about your appeal.

PHYLICIA

So, are you here to get the "famous last words of Phylcia Miller"?

ANGIE

No. No interviewing this time. I just came to spend some time with you.

PHYLICIA

Oh? You starting to get a crush or something? I'm just messin' with you.

ANGIE

I can't believe them. They shaved your head already?

PHYLICIA

No. I'm makin' a statement. They ain't gonna take everything from me, ya know what I'm sayin'?

ANGIE

It looks good on you.

PHYLICIA

Uh-oh, maybe you are startin' to like me. Naw, I'm just trying to make you smile. How's the book comin'?

ANGIE

It's definitely a work in progress. I submitted part of what I'd written for this grant, and I actually got it- which means I'd be writing full time and staying home with Monica. If I decide to take it.

PHYLICIA

If?

ANGIE

Yeah, we'll see.

PHYLICIA

That's what you love, right? The writing stuff?

ANGIE

Umm-hmm., but I have the salon and...

PHYLICIA

In my opinion, if it's worth anything, there really ain't no point in livin' if there's not somethin' that makes you wanna get out of bed each day. I don't think you have a choice but to take it. Besides, wasn't I in some of those parts that you gave to them people. You know- for the grant?

ANGIE

Part of our first meeting was...

PHYLICIA

(she smiles)

Well then you kinda owe me then -right?

(ANGIE doesn't respond)

Right?

ANGIE

(looks up at PHYLICIA and smiles back)

Right.

PHYLICIA

Alright then mama. Congratulations. That's good stuff.

ANGIE

I brought a couple of things for you.

PHYLICIA

Aw snap! Gifts! You ain't have to do that.

ANGIE

Here's the first one.

PHYLICIA

More cigarettes. Too bad I quit smoking. I figure I should at least have clean lungs when I meet my Maker. I already got enough strikes against me.

ANGIE

Here's another one.

(she hands PHYLICIA the envelope)

PHYLICIA

There better not be a sappy Hallmark card in here. Those things make me cry- and don't nobody see me cry.

ANGIE

Let me explain before you open it. Shit. I always get self-conscious giving gifts for some reason. Most people feel that way when they get them...

PHYLICIA

Ok. Well then here.

(she secretly gives ANGIE a note that is folded in the shape of a triangle)

Look down and slide it toward you. Now we can be self-conscious together. (awkward pause)

ANGIE

Thank you.

(ANGIE begins to unfold the note)

PHYLICIA

But you can't open it yet. It's a kite. Notes we pass along to each other on the inside that say something important- you know that we can't tell each other out loud. So you can't open it here.

ANGIE

O.k.

PHYLICIA

Cool.

ANGIE

Cool. You can open yours if you want...

(PHYLICIA reaches in the package and pulls out a book)

ANGIE

It's a book.

PHYLICIA

I can see what it is. Would you just calm down. Wait a minute! Is this your book? How'd it come out already?

ANGIE

No it's...

PHYLICIA

I'm just playin! But it looks like you though. The lady on the cover.

ANGIE

Wow. Thank you. That's Angela Davis. She's one of my heroines. It's about her life. I just thought... you said that there were no good things to read here and that 2-Pac was your only inspiration about prison and stuff.. wow I sound so stupid... it's just that.. Angela Davis was also in prison for a crime that she didn't commit...

PHYLICIA

I never told you...

ANGIE

And she talks about what it was like for her in prison, and how she kept fighting for hope...

PHYLICIA

Thank you. I will read it. I promise.

ANGIE

There's something else in there.

PHYLICIA

(pulls out a CD) Yup. This is the one. How'd you find this? It's been awhile since I seen this picture. Not since my momma had to go stay at the hospital and I had to pack up all her things. I thought about keeping the record for myself, but I didn't. (holds up the CD) See how I kinda look like her with my head to the side?

ANGIE

Yeah you do. I thought maybe you might appreciate her music right now. It might...

PHYLICIA

Make it so it don't hurt so much.

ANGIE

Yeah.

(There is a long pause.)

PHYLICIA

So you know all this time, you never asked me about that night.

ANGIE

I read about it enough in the papers. The more I got to know you, the more it didn't really matter.

PHYLICIA

Well, I'd feel better if I told you. You know, told you myself. I want to tell you what really happened... so you know.

ANGIE

Alright.

PHYLICIA

It wasn't self-defense. It was just killing somebody. Killing for revenge ain't really no excuse. A jury don't give a fuck about some lesbian love story that ends tragically. What's done is done. I never thought I could ever kill anyone. I never went over there to kill Chris. I had the gun to threaten him you know- jut scare the shit outta him. Cassandra had called me just screamin' like crazy- sayin' he was beating her again. She had managed to get away and lock herself in her room. I could hear that nigga tryin' to get in the door. I went and got my boy Darin's gun and drove over there. I just wanted to protect her you know? So the door was unlocked when I got to the apartment- but I ain't hear nothin' so I started callin' for her. I was like, "Cassandra- baby I'm here it's ok. Where are you?" I went up the stairs, and when I saw her bedroom door had been busted through- my fuckin' body just like caught fire- so I ran up the stairs to her room and Chris was just sittin' on the bed cryin'. I thought -damn he doin' that same old pussy cryin'- apologizin' shit again but when he moved his arm to cover his face I could see her layin' there with a pillow over her head and her arm hanging over the bed. The mother fucker had smothered her- my baby. Chris turned and saw me - called me a fuckin' ugly dyke- told me the shit was my fault- and when he turned his face back around I shot that nigga right in the head. I heard the gun fire, but I don't remember even holding it.

ANGIE

And then what?

PHYLICIA

And then I just laid down next to Cassandra and just held her till the police came.

(Nina Simone's "Four Women" plays
softly)

THE SHOP VS HALLE

"Revolution" by Nina Simone plays loudly. The TV is on. JASMINE is dancing around the shop doing closing duties. ANGIE is reading the letter from PHYLICIA to herself. The Count Down Until the Festival sign reads- 1 Day

JASMINE

Are you sure there isn't something you want to tell me?

ANGIE

Yes.

JASMINE

I found something in your supply drawer when I was looking for my scissors.

(she pulls out several pictures of PHYLICIA that look like they were cut out of a newspaper)

Are you.. you know.. why do you have all of these pictures of this woman who looks like Snoop Doggy Dog in your drawer?

ANGIE

Give me those.

JASMINE

I thought we were closer than that Ang.

ANGIE

It's nothing.

JASMINE

If you're a lesbian you should have just told me. Honestly, you studying that feminist stuff I knew it would get to your head one day.

ANGIE

That's really ignorant.

JASMINE

You're the one runnin around with a He/She Snoop look alike not caring if you got a man or not- and you have a daughter who looks up to you.

ANGIE

This has nothing to do with me and my daughter, AND... it's not your business Jas.

JASMINE

What you mean it's none of my business? You actin all secretive -don't tell nobody where you goin- late for your customers- I would say it is my business.

ANGIE

No, actually it's not.

(ANGIE closes register hard-turns off CD player- turns up television)

JASMINE

Excuse you?

ANGIE

I want to watch TV. (Access Hollywood plays)

JASMINE

We ain't finished talkin about this man-woman...

ANGIE

Yes, we are.

(she turns up the television)

I'm so sick of hearing about Halle Berry's ass. "Now that Halle won the Oscar we've come so far. She's done so much for women of color." Please, she's just a mirror image of how white people want to view black women.

JASMINE

Don't be hatin' on Halle's fine-talented ass for winnin' the Academy Award just cause you don't wanna tell nobody what's really goin' on.

ANGIE

They didn't give an Academy Award to Whoopi Goldberg for the "Color Purple." She should have been the first. Not Halle.

JASMINE

If somebody told you you looked like Whoopi Goldberg would you think it was a compliment?

ANGIE
Yes.

JASMINE
Over Halle Berry?

ANGIE
Yep.

JASMINE
You are such a lie!

ANGIE
She changed the standards of beauty for black women. Like when Tracy Chapman first came out with her "Fast Car" album...

JASMINE
And thank God that car was goin' fast so didn't nobody have to look at her!

ANGIE
That is so rude.

JASMINE
Oh well.

ANGIE
What about Grace Jones?

JASMINE
Who?

ANGIE
From the 80's.

JASMINE
I know you are not talking about that charcoal black Amazon with the mohawk. What does she have to do with anything?

ANGIE
Charcoal black Amazon! How do these words form in your brain and have the nerve to come out of your mouth? She was fierce. She rocked a mohawk and had white folks thinking she was hot in the 80's?! She was a model. She had a few parts in movies...

JASMINE
What movies?

ANGIE

(pauses to think) She was in that James Bond movie.

JASMINE

Oh yes I remember that. And as I recall she played a villain in that movie. I wonder why? Maybe because she was SCARY looking.

ANGIE

This is ridiculous. Why do I even bother trying to talk to you?

JASMINE

Oh I'm sorry. It's just that you sittin' up here arguin' tryin to convince me that these women are attractive when they all basically look like men-so excuse me if I'm not totally convinced that you might not be just a little bit "funny."

ANGIE

I am done having this conversation.

JASMINE

Alright fine. You don't want to tell me the truth, then don't. Fuck it. It's not like you haven't told me everything else that goes on in your life.

ANGIE

There's nothing to tell.

JASMINE

And I'm Whitney Houston.

(suddenly realizing)

Oh shit! Turn it to Channel 9. The American Idol results are coming in tonight. It's 8:45. It's about to be over. Turn it. Turn it!

ANGIE

Looks like Tamira's goin' home.

JASMINE

You made me miss it whining about Halle Berry and Whoopi Goldberg. I don't believe this.

ANGIE

There's truth in what I'm trying to say.

JASMINE

So you went to college and you're always reciting facts... but what are you really saying?

ANGIE

This from the woman who loves Nina Simone, has all of her CD's, but doesn't even know what it is she's listening to.

JASMINE

I know what I'm listening to.

ANGIE

The very music you play in your shop on a daily basis comes from one of the most revolutionary thinkers of her time. Her songs evoke change. That's the very thing I'm talking about that you think is "silly." You don't even deserve those damn Nina tickets.

JASMINE

Her music gets me through my day and has for many years. I know about her politics. And with all that talking you do—what changes have you made in the world lately? You sit up on a pedestal looking down at the rest of us, wagging your all knowing finger.

ANGIE

I don't think I'm...

JASMINE

(interrupts) Why don't you go teach in somebody's school or write something of significance instead of talking down to folks, whining about shit you can't change.

ANGIE

You have no idea.

JASMINE

Personally, I think Nina Simone would think you were a snob not an activist. Because an activist is someone who actually gets off their butt and does something.

ANGIE

I have been doing something.

JASMINE

Besides running your mouth?

(ANGIE goes to grab the newspaper clippings of PHYLICIA)

ANGIE

Maybe if you bothered to read the article that goes with the picture, you would know that Snoop Doggy Dog, as you call her, is actually Phylicia Miller.

JASMINE

Well excuse me Ms.....

ANGIE

I have been going to the prison downtown for the past three months to talk to her because I am trying to writing a book. I picked up the newspaper for inspiration and sure enough there's this article about Phylicia you found in MY drawer. She's on death row for shooting and killing someone. Her appeal was denied today so don't...

JASMINE

Now I know you officially crazy-going to a prison to make small talk with a murderer?

ANGIE

Small talk? No, Jas. That's what you and I do. Phylicia and I talk about more meaningful things in thirty minutes than you and I have talked about in five years.

JASMINE

Well excuse me for not being a dyke in jail with no contact with the outside world.

ANGIE

You sit up here shoveling Mc Donalds into your face complaining because you don't have a man commenting on what's wrong with everyone else-when you are responsible for the very thing that keeps you lonely.

JASMINE

Don't talk to me about not having a man when you...

ANGIE

I don't care Jasmine. How many times are you going to bring that up? I am raising Monica on my own, yes. And it's hard and sometimes I come in here and complain...

JASMINE

Sometimes?

ANGIE

But I choose to rise above that and have dreams and goals because there are so many other things that define who I am other than if I'm somebodies woman or not.

JASMINE

That's cause you went and got yourself your own woman.

ANGIE

I am not a lesbian! But what if I was? Who cares? You're whole life is this stupid shop. That's all you know. Hamburgers, hair, and counting out a cash register. I would never want to end up like you.

JASMINE

Who brought you into this shop in the first place when you were fresh outta college? Broken-hearted cause you couldn't get no job, with a degree in women's studies, and you had a little girl to feed at home? Do you know how much more money I could have brought into this shop with a trained stylist? But no, I gave Angie a chance. So why don't you just go on then. Why don't you just take that big, sidity, ever so important brain of yours and go on about your business.

ANGIE

Fine I will. And you can keep your stupid freakin' tickets. Good luck finding someone to go with.

JASMINE

For your information, there was never a doubt in my mind that you were gonna be the one to get this ticket. Who the fuck else would I give it to?

(ANGIE'S attention is suddenly drawn to the television)

ANGIE

Jasmine.

(ANGIE turns up the television which is reporting the death of Nina Simone and the cancellation of the Jazz Festival in observance of her memory.)

What?
JASMINE
(turns and looks at television)
She left us.

What?
ANGIE

She's gone.
JASMINE
(after a long pause)

Jas?
ANGIE

Huh?
JASMINE

Do you think we killed her?
ANGIE

What?
JASMINE

Our arguing. I mean the way we were talking to one another...
ANGIE

That's silly.
JASMINE

Jas?
ANGIE

Huh?
JASMINE

What are we going to do now?
ANGIE

What do you mean?
JASMINE

What do we have to look forward to?
ANGIE

JASMINE

I don't know. Not much.

(ANGIE crosses to her barber chair and sits. She then picks up a pair of shears that are sitting on the stand in front of her and begins to cut large amounts of her hair. JASMINE is panicked)

JASMINE

What in the hell are you doing? You know how long it takes for us to grow our hair back? A year or two years for all that to grow back! What about your identity stuff? Now look at you!

ANGIE

Exactly my point. I'm starting over. What else can we do?

(JASMINE watches ANGIE for a fairly long period of time. She then picks up the shears that are by her stand and slowly begins to cut at her hair. The two of them cut in silence as the lights fade to black)

Part Four: BALD

THE SHOP: COMMENTARY #5

JASMINE and ANGIE sit in their barber chairs looking at one another. Hair lays on the floor all around them.

JASMINE

You do realize we just lost all of our customers.

ANGIE

You might be right.

JASMINE

I know I'm right. Ain't nobody gonna wanna get they hair done by too bald freaks.

ANGIE

It feels good though. When's the last time you could feel a breeze on your scalp?

JASMINE

Birth.

(the two of them share a chuckle)

What are we gonna Ang?

ANGIE

I got a grant.

JASMINE

You what?

ANGIE

I didn't tell you because I was terrified I wasn't going to get it, and I didn't want to hurt you because if I got it, that would mean I would have to leave the shop. Fifteen thousand dollars and they want me to complete a draft of my book by the end of the year, but it's not really even enough to live on so I don't know if I can take it.

JASMINE

No. You have to take it. I'm serious Ang. We can't keep livin' through Nina, or Angela Davis, or whoever. People are going to be reading your words.

(she points ANGIE towards the mirror)

Look in that mirror. It's right there.

The movement, Angela Bradley, is right in front of you. Look at her. She's a beautiful, bald, intellectual, strong single mother. I think a whole lotta other folks beside me need to hear those brilliant things she's gotta say. I'm so proud of you Ang.

ANGIE

I'm so sorry for saying all those horrible things Jasmine.

JASMINE

No, I do need to get off my butt and motivate. Look at me. I look like Jabba the Hut now with this bald head.

(ANGIE embraces JASMINE who is surprised by the gesture of affection)

ANGIE

No, you look beautiful. You saved me Jasmine. You really did.

JASMINE

I actually have something that I should have told you about too.

ANGIE

Okay...

JASMINE

(JASMINE walks over to her station and pulls out a book from the drawer)

My cheat sheet. It's called I Put A Spell on You. It's Nina Simone's autobiography.

ANGIE

I know.

(ANGIE walk over to her stand and pulls out her copy of the book.)

JASMINE

How did you know about that?

ANGIE

Let's just say a little bird who also talks to herself told me.

JASMINE

Mrs. Bernadette told you too?

ANGIE

Yes she did.

JASMINE

That crazy ol' buzzard.

ANGIE

You know she gave me some of her hair for good luck. I went ahead and put in your drawer.

JASMINE

Ooh, no wonder I been feelin' so crazy lately. But I guess it's workin. You got your grant. Angie Bradley-world famous writer and activist! A moment of silence for Nina-shall we?

ANGIE and JASMINE bow their heads for a moment of silence. Suddenly Jas gets an idea.

JASMINE

Oh my God! Nina just spoke to me.

ANGIE

Excuse me?

JASMINE

I swear to you I just heard her voice in my ear.

ANGIE

What did she say?

JASMINE

She said, "Call it The Nina"

ANGIE

Call what "The Nina?"

Jasmine crosses to the mirror and looks at herself and touches her head.

JASMINE

Call it the Nina. The style. Let's call this The Nina.

ANGIE

The hair?

JASMINE

You know how black woman are. If I can sell this idea everyone will be wanting to get it. I'll just invoke the spirit of Nina's diva power and say, "This is the latest honey. It's all about freedom, and strength while still looking absolutely sexy and beautifully sophisticated. It's called the Nina- after our late sistah Nina Simone who passed away yesterday - so show some respect.

ANGIE

Now THAT is brilliant!

JASMINE

Why it is-isn't it? We're gonna be just fine Ang.

ANGIE

Yeah Jas. We are.